

Postscripts by Jack Post

Southeasterly across the water from Duxbury lies Clark's Island, guarded with rocks and a deep channel along its inhospitable bay shore, but flattening into fields along the shore toward Saquish, which rounds into a gentle cove bordered with a few old houses just short of the tall trees.

The Island's story is simply enough told from the days when the shallop from the Mayflower landed there in that chill December storm of 1620, wracked and almost wrecked by the sea, to find shelter in that same protecting cove, where the virgin forest, extending almost to the water's edge, broke the force of the northerly gale and provided shelter for the exhausted Englishmen. The next day, it being the Sabbath, they rested and held their first religious service ashore in the New World, up at Election Rock at the high point of the island.

Following the settlement of Plymouth, Clark's Island became common land, its wood sold to provide support for the town's minister, its sea-girt boundaries used to contain the "praying Indians" at the time of King Phillip's War lest they be massacred by their heathen brothers, and also lest they might revert to savagery themselves. For a while 1,200 Indians lived there, a greater population than the island has known before or since.

The Governor Andros in 1687 haughtily appropriated the place for his own, bestowing it as a reward on one of his minions, which pleased the freemen of Plymouth not one whit, and led them to take legal action against the tyrannical governor in a suit which finally restored the island to their ownership, a fleeting triumph, for legal costs come high, and the citizens could repay their counsel only by selling what they had just won.

So for the first time this little island on the edge of the bay became private property, the fiefdom for many succeeding generations of the Watson clan of Plymouth, many of them distinguished men in their times who became intimates of such leaders as Franklin and Washington, or later of Emerson and Thoreau.

After the tall trees had been cut for masts, the island supported a variety of crops, with Clark's Island turnips somehow attaining a degree of fame. The Watsons never sold, never abandoned their island even in winter until well into the 20th century, when at last the rigors of pioneering life grew less attractive to the coming generation.

During these years Sarah Wingate Taylor, poet, authoress, and a direct descendant herself of Edward Winslow who had landed on Clark's Island from the Mayflower shallop in 1620, was conducting summer seminars at Cedarfield, her portion of the ancestral grant, instilling in others her love of the Pilgrim tradition. When she died, she left her property in trust to the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society to perpetuate that interest.

Every summer now the society, working closely with the Watson family members, opens Cedarfield to the public for a day on which a memorial service is once again held at Election Rock, where the Pilgrim leaders elected to give thanks for their deliverance in their first service held ashore. That year it took place in the dead of winter; now in the heat of July in the tree shaded meadow surrounding the craggy ledge.

People come and listen, thinking back to those devoted men who stood here in the zero weather three and one half centuries ago. Then in the heat they walk slowly back to the shore, stopping perhaps to inspect Cedarfield, the second oldest house on the island. They gather up their picnic baskets and heave their boats off the pebbly beach to return to the mainland before the tide can strand them on an island that has no running water, no telephone, and no electricity. Most of them allow a comfortable margin of safety, for it would be unthinkable to have to spend a night separated from the amenities of civilization. Next year they will come again, climb once more to the rock, and think once again of the path that led us to the present.

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